

## SONALLAH IBRAHIM THE VOICE OF RESISTANCE: INTERTEXTUALITY, SYMBOLISM AND THE ROOTS OF THE REVOLUTION

**Dr. Khaled Abkar Alkodimi**

Department of English, Faculty of Education  
University of Albydha, Yemen

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper reads Sonallah Ibrahim's novel Dhat as a prophecy that foreshadow the signs of the current Egyptian revolution that took place at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and which has inspired other Arabic regions as well. His satiric attitude highlights issues of social injustice, in particular, class oppression in Egypt. However, the question is, what are the narrative techniques that Ibrahim used to express his perspectives? And to what extent these views reflect the social reality of Egypt. The paper argues that Ibrahim's angry tone is largely delivered through intertextuality and symbolism which appeared to be the driving force of Ibrahim's social satire. The discussion mainly focuses on the use of these satirical devices through which Ibrahim presented a panoramic view of social injustice in his society. It concludes with the view that Ibrahim's critical skills have been carefully interwoven to suggest the sharp socio-economic contrast of the existing situation which ultimately leads to the burst of the Arabic spring.*

**Key words:** *Ibrahim, intertextuality, symbolism, satire, social injustice, revolution*

### Introduction

This paper examines Ibrahim's *Dhat* in relation to the current Egyptian revolution. It focuses on Ibrahim's use of intertextuality and symbolism to portray the social reality of Egypt and to provoke the revolutionary spirit among individuals. Indeed, the three-fold: freedom, equality and justice represent the prime vehicle of the current revolution in Egypt. Significantly, these concepts inform Ibrahim's literary works since its outset. The narrative technique might differ but the theme is almost always the same, i.e. the longing for a social reform. So, the recurrence of what can be referred to as the seeds of the revolution, referred to above, indicate that Ibrahim's dilemma is, indeed, a call for a radical social change. Like Bernard Shaw, Ibrahim is a propagandist who propagates his social views to bring about a change in his society. Perhaps this is why Samia Mehrez referred to him as an example of Walter Benjamin's understanding of "the author as producer". For Mehrez, a new image of the artist, that of a 'revolutionary producer' became central to the literary field. Mehrez seems to emphasize the powerful themes and ideas of the literary works where the writers of the period are actively participating in cultivating the public opinion of the necessity of the social reformation (Mehrez 13-14).

As such, Ibrahim, the socialist activist can be considered a revolutionist whose aim was not solely to reveal the truth but more importantly to motivate the public to revolt against the unjust social system. For instance, Ibrahim seems to be convinced as early as his novel *Al-Lajna* (1982), that the revolution shall take place in Egypt.

“From my investigations of history and cases similar to mine, I perceived that via this very process of change and transformation- your group will gradually lose what authority it has, while the power of those like me to confront and resist it will grow. ... for this is the logic of history and the nature of life” (*The Committee* 157).

This conversation between the narrator protagonist of *Al-Lajna* and Stubby, a member of the committee clearly illustrates the resistant spirit of Ibrahim, expressed through his mouth speech. In this novel, the narrator protagonist went further and killed Stubby to defend his freedom and privacy. Such rebellious spirit is an important sign of Ibrahim’s longing for a revolution to alter the socioeconomic system. Hence, he is almost convinced that sooner or later such change would take place.

Ibrahim’s view is carried over through his subsequent novel, *Dhat* which further strengthens the idea of the revolution. This novel, according to Mehrez, is not merely a novel that critiques a regime of the past, “it is one that hits hard at the present, in all its manifestations- social, economic, cultural, ideological, religious [and] political (Mehrez 129).

But, what is at stake here is the narrative techniques used by Ibrahim to sharpen his critical views of the social illnesses spread in his society. Significantly, other than using irony, allegory and exaggeration that inform his previous novel, *Al-Lajna* (Alkodimi 2010), intertextuality and symbolism seem to be the prime vehicle through which Ibrahim has delivered his criticism and social perspectives in *Dhat*. It should be noted, however, that the analysis is based on the translated version of Ibrahim’s *Dhat* (Translated as *Zaat* 2001) by Anthony Calderbank.

### **Intertextuality: Reality Verses the Imaginary**

Critics claim that intertextuality is an aspect of the 20th century, whereby a “text refers to, or borrows from, other texts” (Ogborn 26). As Roland Barthes writes, “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture ... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original” (qtd. in Graham Allen 13). Similarly, Julia Kristeva defines intertextuality as a text “constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (qtd. in Kehinde 373). Drawing on these definitions, Graham Allen notes that the fundamental concept of intertextuality is that:

[N]o text, much as it might like to appear so, is original and unique-in-itself; rather it is a tissue of inevitable, and to an extent unwitting, references to and quotations from other texts. These in turn condition its meaning; the text is an intervention in a cultural system (6).

However, the task of this section is not to delve into an examination of intertextuality in itself, but rather to explore Ibrahim's employment of it as a technique of satire. In this sense, I would claim that Ibrahim uses intertextual references to help achieve his satirical effects. Ogborn notes that satirical writers, like Ibrahim, make considerable use of intertextuality "as a basis for a text which either makes fun of its subject or treats it ironically" (26). Zappen, meanwhile, observes that "intertextuality's major rhetorical benefit comes from its use of resources in the larger intertext to involve the user in the construction of the text's meaning" (Zappen 2009). The significance of the use of intertextuality for social commentary is further stressed by Graham Allen who notes that "intertextuality reflects visions of society and human relations," adding that such a concept can be "employed to make comments on, or even capture the characteristics of, a section of society or even a period of history" (5).

Indeed, intertextuality forms an essential satirical technique in Ibrahim's *Dhat*; used to aid his depiction and criticism of inequality, oppression, and the corruption of the ruling class. He uses actual clippings and comments from newspapers and magazines, and integrates them with the life story of Zaat as a means of contextualisation, so as to ridicule the socioeconomic and the political system as well. For instance, at one point in the novel, Ibrahim quotes the former president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, saying: "We should not be ashamed that there are poor people in Egypt" (*Dhat* 127). However, the context in which Ibrahim places this otherwise ordinary excerpt makes Mubarak appear very ridiculous: Ibrahim does not add to the speech, but quotes it verbatim, therefore skilfully criticising Mubarak with his own words. What this excerpt achieves is to create a sense of irony: while the poor people are waiting for the leader of the country to solve their agony, the president appears completely oblivious to their misery, which makes the entire situation seem ridiculous to the audience.

Draz notes that the "intertextual approach" constitutes an important element in Ibrahim's second novel, *The Star of Egypt* (1974). She also stresses that the "use of these texts in the novel [The Star of Egypt] is ironical", ("In Quest of New Narrative Forms" 154). However, what Draz did not address is how intertextuality forms part of Ibrahim's satirical arsenal in general, beyond the scope of *The Star of Egypt*. Given that Ibrahim has utilised intertextuality to supplement the atmosphere of irony as early as his second novel, *The Star of Egypt*, it is then clear that such a technique constitutes an essential part of Ibrahim's social satire. It is therefore the aim of this paper to explore the way intertextuality is employed by Ibrahim for satirical effects.

As Ibrahim's main concern is social justice, he skilfully employs intertextuality and symbolism to ridicule inequality in terms of lifestyle, education, healthcare and wages. Where lifestyle and

housing are concerned, Ibrahim plays up the contrast between the miserable life of the poor classes and the luxurious style of life that capitalists enjoy. Zaat, for example, lives in a very shabby house where:

[S]he had to wrap a piece of cloth around the bathroom pipe to stop the water leaking or when she noticed the layers of grease and smoke ingrained on the kitchen walls ... and the metal chain that usually ended up dangling just above the head of the person sitting on the toilet ... (*Dhat* 48).

Zaat's picture of poverty is further stressed using intertextual quote in an attempt to draw our attention to the miserable life of the working class in Egypt: "Poor working-class districts of Alexandria are flooded with sewage after work begins on the first stage of the urgent waste water project" (*Dhat* 104).

In contrast to this picture of Zaat's relative poverty, Ibrahim draws our attention to the wealth of the upper class by means of intertextual references: "The villa of fugitive millionaire Henry Michel Zeidan, which contains a swimming pool, is handed over to senior religious figure after restorations costing 190 thousand pounds" (*Dhat* 97). Another example: "The land in East Port Said containing the former premises of Ideal, which is owned by the Deputy Prime Minister's brother, is sold for two million pounds" (*Dhat* 131). This picture is further enhanced within the context of Zaat's story, when her husband Abdel Maguid finds himself in a suburb of Cairo where houses look very comfortable even from outside:

Then on over broken pavements occupied by cars in orderly rows, single, double ... It was as if everyone in Egypt had a vehicle except Abdel Maguid ... With the same amorous rapture he contemplated the spacious flats in El Mirghany with their wide balconies shaded with plants each sealed with an air-conditioning unit (*Dhat* 200).

Thus, Ibrahim deliberately draws our attention to the picture of the other side of the tracks, as it were: the rich people. He critically contrasts both to mock the large gap between the ruling and the lower classes: not only do the former live in the lap of luxury cliché, but they also divide the state property among themselves, as evident in the following example:

The truth is that Galal El Sadat only took one flat. The details of the five flats are as follows ... They say that the third flat was rented to a gentleman named Ahmad Abbas who was the brother-in-law of Galal El Sadat ... They say that the fourth apartment was rented to Suheir El Sadat, whose husband is an officer in the armed forces ... flats were distributed ... some flats for members of the judiciary and others for officers in the armed forces (*Dhat* 22-3).

The above intertextual quotations clearly expose the greediness and the corruption of the ruling class whereby Ibrahim's target of satire appears ridiculous and disgusting indeed: such as evident in their sense of entitlement, considering Egypt to be their own 'property'. Hence, these actual press clippings which supply the social and historical background of Zaat's story depict the social reality of Egypt. This strategy, in other words, reveal the existing situation of the Egyptian society that might not be fully exposed using other means of satire since intertextuality makes people read about their own daily life experiences. Ibrahim's genuine satirical skills lies in the yoking together of the reality with the imaginary which helps to narrow down the gap between the story of Zaat and the real society. The author seems to suggest that Zaat's world is not a fictitious one, but a part of the reality.

Inequality as a sign of social injustice is further ridiculed through the wages that representatives from both classes receive, which probably represents the best indication of inequality. Both Abdel Maguid and his colleague Abdel Rahim work as bank employees, but whereas Maguid receives a very low salary, the later, whose is related to the Minister of Irrigation receives a monthly salary of USD3,500 (*Dhat* 85). These pictures clearly illustrate how upper class individuals are highly paid and dominate high positions; this is foregrounded by intertextual references, namely the insertion of quotations from the daily press sources, as in the following examples: "The brother of a senior official is appointed advisor to the Italian company Montedison at a fee of four thousand dollars a month" (*Dhat* 97); "Mohamed Sayyed Abdel Monem, managing director of El Salam Hospital is paid five thousand pounds a month" (97); and "Fourteen retired generals and brigadier generals are appointed to public sector construction companies with monthly salaries of 600 pounds plus their pensions from the armed forces" (125).

Lower class individuals, on the other hand, receive very low salaries: "A central security trooper: we get paid six pounds a month, the price of one loaf of foreign bread in the Jolie ville" (*Dhat* 163). This starkness of this wage gap is further hammered home in the following excerpt:

If you're lucky enough you get to work for one of the officers, driving his car, taking his children to school, or taking his wife shopping. Maybe you clean the house, make the food, or paint the walls, or work on the officer's farm or his shop (164).

Hence, these intertextual quotes, along with Zaat's story clearly illustrate the idea of the massive gap between the rich and the poor, which is carefully interwoven in the narrative. Through Zaat and her family, their neighbours, Al Shanqeety and his wife, as well as the working class and peasants, Ibrahim has vividly depicted the difficulties of low-income groups in his society at large.

Ibrahim's criticism reaches the peak when his eraser shifts the focus towards health and medical care treatment received by both classes. In this respect, Ibrahim's satirical skills lie in the comic minor detailed description of Zaat's torture of sickness: she suffers from breast cancer, and does not receive adequate medication despite going to many clinics and hospitals. Instead, she decides to surrender to her illness, and stay home. Thus, amidst her struggle for economic success, the new chapter that opens in her miserable life journey is her cancer. In the sequence where Zaat sees a doctor, she is submitted to a careful examination, but unfortunately, the doctor assures her that she has cancer and that he "would be waiting for her in the morning in order to remove one of her breasts ..." (57). With this news, Zaat's suffering and misery are compounded. Her agony is further stressed by the cruelly brief story of Eid Abou El Ras, Zaat's colleague at work. "One day he complained of severe pains in his stomach. Zaat advised him to go to the ... doctor, who referred him to the [surgeon], which in turn, after emergency surgery, referred him to his grave" (145). Even though his story is published in a number of articles, no one pays any attention. Zaat demands that those who are responsible for his fate be identified; but given that he was marginalised even when alive, he is completely overlooked now. What is important to note here is that Ibrahim uses the story of Zaat's sickness and Abu El Ras' death to illustrate an important truth: the suffering and negligent treatment of those in the low income strata.

Against the portrait of the tortured Zaat, Ibrahim shockingly introduces the news of the governor who travelled abroad for a medical check-up: "The governor of Alexandria, accompanied by his family, travels to the United States, Britain, and France for medical treatment ..." (*Dhat* 101). Through this intertextual reference, Ibrahim is able to work in a clandestine contrast between the two situations, that of Zaat and Abu El Ras' suffering, and the governor travelling abroad to get the best medical treatment. In doing so, Ibrahim seems to question the social injustice, where a small minority of the people of Egypt are able to enjoy rights over everything. As Barker notes, there is "little doubt that we live in social formations organised along capitalist lines that manifest deep class divisions in work, wages, housing, education and health" (13). These 'deep class divisions', mentioned above, establish the source of inspiration for Ibrahim to mock the absurdity of the situation in Egypt.

Significantly, the intertextual references and the allegorical story of Zaat are fully integrated to present a panoramic view of contemporary Egypt, as well as to clearly show that Egyptian society is made up of two distinct categories, those who have the money and the power, and those who do not. The latter represent the majority and are thoroughly oppressed, exploited and deprived from the basic needs of social life. From a Marxist perspective, this division is one that is cantered on the possession of the means of production: "the basic classes in a society [are] defined by the possession or non-possession of the means of production and that these property relations were the basis of class relations in the capital and labour market" (Scott 85).



### Oppression and Resistance: Satiric Symbolism

Other than by employing intertextuality as a means of satire, Ibrahim also utilises symbolism to reveal the social injustice in his society. As Feinberg notes the satirist “makes use of symbols as a means of indirection and distortion”—such as Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, which offers “a well-minded source for satiric symbols”, where Lilliput stands for England; the King as George I, and High Heels and Low Heels for Tories and Whigs (198-9). He also states that James Joyce’s works, such as *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*, are rife with symbolism, “offer[ing] a great many satiric images” that are used to achieve critical effects (200). Symbolism and allegory, as Edgar Roberts (1995) also states, are “modes that expand meaning,” with the symbol “creat[ing] a direct meaningful equation between (i) a specific object, scene, character, or action and (ii) ideas, persons, or ways of life,” and being nothing but a substitute for the element being signified (126-7).

Like Swift, Ibrahim demonstrates a great capacity for the use of symbolism to achieve satirical effects. However, unlike Swift, Ibrahim uses real names and settings, instead of imaginary ones, given that such names have certain associations in the minds of the readers. For instance, Ibrahim uses Gamal Abdel Nasser, the symbol of social justice, equality and freedom, not only in Egypt but in the whole of the Arab world, to mock the contemporary socioeconomic system, characterised by injustice, inequality and oppression. In other words, through the symbol of Nasser, Ibrahim seems to express the longing and resistance—the longing for the past and the resistance of the present. By longing for the past, represented through Nasser and the socialist ideals he stands for, Ibrahim indirectly condemns the present capitalist regime; that is to say, Ibrahim uses Nasser, a near-worshipped character in Egypt, as a hammer to bludgeon the inadequacies of the present social system. The irony lies in the fact that even though Nasser’s era was not very successful, it was by any stretch of the imagination better than Sadat’s and his successor, Husny Mubarak, with the further irony that Ibrahim himself was jailed under Nasser.

Using symbolism and intertextuality, Ibrahim savagely attacked the oppression of low income groups and indirectly condemn the capitalist market inaugurated by Al-Sadat, which according to the author is responsible for the suffering and the oppression of people like Zaat and her family:

Fortune befriended her, however, for the effects of the ever-widening chasm between Abdel Maguid and his dreams were beginning to tell (the capitalist dream that had seemed almost attainable under the socialism of Abdel Nasser had amazingly enough become impossible during the capitalist era of El Sadat) (*Dhat* 14).

Paradoxically, while Sadat’s capitalist era was supposed to improve the quality of life in Egypt, the situation became worse through abuse, and people like Abdel Maguid became poorer instead.

By comparing the regimes of Nasser and Sadat, the author mockingly suggests that even though Nasser was a socialist, the quality of life for Egyptians improved, and people could achieve their dreams. Apparently, the novelist seems to insist on justice and equality among people, which the Sadat and Mubarak era lacks. The significance of Nasser as a symbol of justice is emphasised by different characters in the novel, such as Abdel Maguid, who seeks confirmation from his wife about who really visits her in her dream: “Are you sure it was Abdel Nasser and not El Sadat? (*Dhat* 49). The dream itself could be a symbol of the loaded nostalgia of people like Zaat and her husband for a return to Nasser’s era—they are forced to live in the past, as opposed to being optimistic about the future. However, Ibrahim uses the past to ridicule the present. The current socioeconomic system, in other words, is presented as a nightmare that has come to haunt the Egyptian people on a psychological level; he ironically suggests that these oppressed people are dreaming of release. Moreover, the dream itself could also imply the longing for a change: it reflects the psychological state of people like Zaat who dream of a better life, a state that is further aggravated as Zaat and Abdel Maguid find themselves totally helpless.

By bringing Nasser back to life, as it were, Ibrahim seems to suggest that even though Nasser’s era has passed, people still believe in his social views regarding equality, freedom, and social justice in general. A theme that is frequently emphasised in *Dhat*: “Kind generous Zaat was a loyal daughter of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s revolution, brought up on the principle that all people are equal regardless of religion or sex or wealth or rank or position” (*Dhat* 89). Mara Naaman notes that “in all his novels, with the exception of *Tilk al-ra’iha* [*The Smell of It* 1971], Ibrahim has sought not only to point to social injustice, but to systematically make the historical case for the root causes and political processes to which injustices might be attributed” (*America Undone* 79).

The past as a measuring gauge of the present capitalist system is further employed through the conflict between the past and the present, in the depictions of the respective eras of the two former presidents, Nasser and Sadat—such as in the sequence when one of Nasser and Sadat’s portraits has to be removed to allow the picture of the new president, Mubarak, to be hung on the wall. Zaat, who is marginalised even at work among her colleagues, strongly believes in Nasser’s social views. She insists that Nasser’s picture should remain on the wall, Sadat’s picture be removed: “If someone has to go, then let it be El Sadat” (*Dhat* 15). For her Nasser’s image is associated with justice, equality and freedom. However, the result is that:

Zaat was transferred to the archives which occupied the top floor of an old neighbours building, up a dark miserable staircase. Occupying most of the floor was a long narrow room packed with wooden and metal desks all crammed together and empty chairs ... But, in the new department, Zaat appeared (as she always appears to her colleague) insignificant and dim-witted (16-17).



Significantly, the two pictures symbolise the past and the present; socialism and capitalism. Ibrahim manages his satire in such a way as to reflect the oppression and marginalisation of poor individuals, and their resistance of the capitalist system. The isolation and estrangement of Zaat due to her status and social views forces her to burst into tears from time to time, as she feels totally disintegrated with her own society and people. Indeed, Zaat's characterisation is nothing but an embodiment of the agony, negligence and the difficulties of her class; her insignificance implies the insignificance and marginalisation of poor people in general. What is at stake here is that, through Zaat story the author seems to suggest that the society is falling apart. Zaat's disintegration with her society embodies the breakdown of society at large.

Furthermore, Zaat's rejection of Sadat's portrait symbolises her resistance of the 'infitah', the open market policy implemented by him which widened the gap among people in Egypt, as economy and power became more and more centralised in the hands of fewer and fewer people. The majority were left to struggle to affirm their existence in the veritable jungle of the consumer market, Zaat is a case in point. She spent her life struggling for success to improve her life-style. However, in spite of the success stories around her, she ultimately fails and her dreams turn into ashes. According to Engels, as time goes by, capitalist production will become concentrated in fewer and fewer large firms, which will also alter the social structure: "The middle class must increasingly disappear until the world is divided into millionaires and paupers, into large landowners and poor farm labourers" (qtd. in Hughes, Sharrock and Martin 43). Ibrahim's satire very much touches upon this reality. His novel depicts Egypt as being of two distinct camps: the rich and the poor. The middle class, the working class and the peasants are classified as one single camp by Ibrahim, being the 'poor'. Businessmen and officials, on the other hand, represent the other category- the capitalists or the ruling class. Even though the latter category has fewer members, they own the means of production, power, and the land—all the things of which the first group is totally deprived.

Indeed, Nasser's image is employed to symbolise the voice of resistance and condemnation for the present state of social affairs, characterised by class oppression and social injustice. Ibrahim carefully creates his characters in such a way as to demonstrate their strong belief in Nasser, who spent his life struggling to achieve justice, equality and freedom and for which he became a prominent figure. Nasser is used as a source of inspiration for poor people to struggle for their rights and social justice; in short, Nasser is both a symbol of justice and hope for poor people like Zaat and her husband. Apparently, this is why Zaat takes his dream instruction seriously, and starts to work harder to improve the quality of her social life. She believes she has the right to be equal with others. Ironically, however, Zaat misinterprets Nasser's message. Instead of revolting against the regime, she rather turns her attention towards changing her life style by focusing on consumerism; but in the process of doing so, she forgets the actual source of her torture, i.e. the system. Nevertheless, Zaat works hard to improve her life-style. But, ultimately, Zaat's spirit is

defeated and her heroic action against the grocery sale person has failed. She realizes towards the end that she lives in a web of conspiracy and corruption.

As noted earlier, Ibrahim develops his criticism in such a way as to expose the oppression of three groups of people—the middle class, class workers and the peasants, all of whom are lumped together as ‘lower class’—as well as the corruption of the ruling class. In this sense, the pendulum of his satire goes back and forth in such a way as to portray the marginalisation and the negligence of such groups. Jihan’s story further illustrates the oppression of poor peasants who have no value in the eyes of the ruling class. The story of Jihan shows that these people do not even have the right to complain or to demand protection:

[Jihan], who was an excellent student (in the preparatory exam she scored 95 percent), insisted on going to school. On the way her feet slipped in the mud and she grabbed onto a lamppost and was electrocuted ... They summoned the father to the police station in the middle of the night ... Look your daughter is dead and that is that. It was her fate. May Allah compensate you for her loss (*Dhat* 154).

Paradoxically in this situation, the victim appears to be the criminal: Jihan’s father is led to the police station, and is forced to sign a statement affirming that nobody is responsible for his daughter’s death. However, one of the police officers says to him: “[T]hat is not enough.” The father asks: “How?” He replies: “By bringing two witnesses who would declare that the daughter had heart disease” (*Dhat* 154). The absurdity of the entire situation makes the subject appear ridiculous, in this case the police officers acting as agents of the oppressive ruling class, who treat the poor like animals of no value, bereft of self-respect. Ibrahim seems to echo Marx’s view that “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (qtd. in Carver 65).

Intertextuality as a method of ridicule is also manifest throughout *Dhat*; in this case, to highlight the actual mechanism of state oppression. Again, these intertextual references function as a reminder that the oppressed Zaat is not a mere imaginary character, but is very much an actual part of the contemporary socioeconomic situation in Egypt: “Central Security Forces using tear gas storm the premises of Esco Textiles to end the workers’ sit-in (138-9). Ibrahim here strongly attacks the state oppression that responds with violence to the sit-in demonstration of the innocent workers. In doing so, Ibrahim is able to paint a more stark reality of the workers’ situation by revealing that they are dehumanised: not only deprived of their basic rights, but are also violently treated as in the following example:

The officers started to tell me [about] torture methods ... Then they started asking me about my work mates and the incidents at the factory and who was behind them. They insulted me and one of the officers hit my face and screamed: Go and get the bastard’s wife so we can ...

her ... Then they stripped me and tied my arms ... and threw me down on the floor so I was lying on my back (141).

The spectre of Nasser is intertextually present in this instance as well. He is used as a symbol to attack the contemporary capitalist regime, and acts as a voice of resistance for state oppression: “Demonstrators in Kafr El Dawar chant: ‘Abdel Nasser where are you?’ All the workers still love you” (*Dhat* 139). In a capitalist society, according to Marxist perspectives, “not only does the state operate in defence of powerful interests; it has itself become one” (Hughes 34). Through his satire, Ibrahim carefully unravels the truth of capitalist systems, where the state itself becomes a tool of oppression against the lower classes. That is to say, Ibrahim reveals and then attacks the devastating effects of capitalism, with the very mention of Nasser by workers reflecting the demand for socialist ideas of justice and equality, given that the modern state, in Althusser’s words, “functions massively and predominantly by repression” (43). D’Amato further stresses the relation between oppression and capitalism, stating that Marxists have argued that “various oppressions cannot be understood separately from capitalism because capitalism depends upon oppression for its survival” (29-30). As he elaborates:

[T]he working class is not only an exploited class—it is also an oppressed class. Workers receive worse education, worse housing and worse job opportunities ... Workers are disadvantaged at every step, stressed under financial and family constraints, forced to work in dangerous jobs and, therefore, more likely to suffer from various physical and mental ailments. In turn, they are then forced to accept the poorest quality health care—if they can get it at all (30).

Ibrahim continues to employ intertextuality to illustrate the resistance for the capitalist system. His attack on capitalism is at its most virulent when a troop of soldiers revolt by marching in the streets and shouting “Mercy, mercy”. The situation shows their consciousness of the source of their suffering, as they attack all that represents capitalism or bourgeoisie. They, in other words, attack the symbolic monuments of capitalism and the aristocracy:

The rioting troops smash the glass front of the Jolie Ville, one of the newest and most luxurious hotels in Cairo, which is located opposite their barracks in the Pyramids area. They then ransack it and set it on fire ... Crazy gangs of Central Security troops rampage through the Pyramids district of Cairo attacking private cars and tourist buses, smashing the widows of boutiques and tourist bazaar, and ransacking nightclubs and cabarets” (*Dhat* 161).

From a Marxist perspective, the proletariat will ultimately revolt and destroy the capitalist system to build a classless society. Ibrahim seems to explore the logical conclusions of such an ideology through his satire. The attacks on the luxurious hotel, private cars and companies symbolise the resistance for, and the revolution against the oppressive system in Egypt: the

burning of the hotel indicates the hatred of the revolted workers and the damage they intend to cause for capitalism in Egypt, as well as a sense of anger and hatred towards the aristocrats. In this way, such a revolution of workers would be a natural consequence, since the rights of the working class have been completely neglected and trampled on by the capitalists in their society. The usage of Nasser as a symbol of inspiration for the revolution is due to his leading of the Egyptian revolution in 1952; his image also implies the call for a reinstatement of socialism as an immediate alternative to the current capitalist system, given that Nasser was a prominent socialist figure not only in Egypt, but in the whole of the Arab region and the world in general. Such anti-capitalist views surely reflect the author's socialist preference for the reinstatement of socialism as the endpoint of social reform.

### Conclusion

Using intertextuality and symbolism, Ibrahim clearly illustrate what referred to as the seeds of the current Egyptian revolution; oppression, inequality, corruption and the lack of freedom. Ibrahim's eraser swings between condemnation of the current socioeconomic system and the longing for a radical social change. The quotations constitute a collage of Egyptian society, but the story also contrast with implied stories of struggle and success and of tragic failure. There is tragedy in Zaat, but it is a tragedy of disintegration that tells us more of society than would a story of heroic failure. Zaat herself is constituted in part by Nasser's vision, in part by the consumer ideology of her time. The intertextual references establish the source of her dreams, and the story shows how their disintegration parallels the disintegration of society. The significance of the above satirical methods lies in the concrete image they provide of the socioeconomic and the political scenarios in Egypt at the present. More importantly, Ibrahim has interwoven reality with the imaginary to suggest the stark socioeconomic contrast between classes. According to him, while the free market policy is shown as bringing about progress and development for the country as a whole, the reality is that this system has benefited only a small group of people, while the majority is left to struggle to confirm its existence.

### References

1. Allen, Graham. (2000). *Intertextuality*. London: Routledge.
2. Alkodimi, Khaled, A. & Noritah, Omar. (2010). Satire in Sonallah Ibrahim's *The Committee: An Allegory to Ridicule Capitalism*. *Gema Online Journal: Journal of Language Studies*. 10(3), 53-65.
3. Althusser, Lois. (2004). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus": A critical and Cultural theory Reader. Ed. Antony Easthope & McGown. England: Open University Press.
4. Carver, Terrell. (1991). *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*. (Ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
5. D'Amato, P. (2006). *The Meaning of Marxism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

6. Draz, Ceza, Qasim. (1981). ("In Quest of New Narrative Forms: Irony in the Works of Four Egyptian Writers, Jamal al-Ghitani, Yahya al-Tahir Abdullah, Majid Tubya, Sun'allah Ibrahim (1969-1979)"). *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1), 137-59.
7. Feinberg, L. (1967). *Introduction to Satire*. Iowa: The Iowa State University Press.
8. Hughes, J. A., Sharrock, W. W. and Martin P. J. (2003). *Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim*. Ed. London: Sage.
9. Ibrahim, S. (2001). *The Committee*. (Mary St. Germain and Charlene Constable. Trans). New York: Syracuse University Press.
10. ... *Zaat*. (2001). (Anthony Calderbank. Trans). Egypt & New York: AUCP, 2001.
11. Kehinde, A. (2003) "Intertextuality and the Contemporary African Novel". *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. 12(3), 372-86.
12. Mehrez, S. (1994). *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction*. Egypt: AUCP.
13. Naaman, M. (2006). "America Undone: Sonallah Ibrahim's Intra-Imperial Investigations". *Alif: Journal of Comparative Politics*. 26, 71-93.
14. Ogborn, J. & Peter, B. (2001). *Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
15. Roberts, E. V. (1995). *Writing About Literature*. New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs.
16. Scott, J. (2006). *Sociology: The Key Concepts*. Ed. London: Routledge.
17. Zappen, J. P. (2007). "Intertextuality, Intentionality, and Persuasion". *Digital Rhetoric*. (Online) Retrieved 24 June 2012, from [http://homepages.rpi.edu/~zappenj/rhetoric/DR/Archive 2007/issues3.html](http://homepages.rpi.edu/~zappenj/rhetoric/DR/Archive%202007/issues3.html)

### Acknowledgement

The Author would like to express gratitude to Associate Professor Dr. Noritah Omar, University Putra Malaysia (UPM), for her insightful comments.